

Integrating Ethics Throughout a Master of Public Administration Program

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Comprehensive Program

2005 Abstract

At the core of any proposal to do something truly new, there is inevitably a reliance on a certain amount of faith and fortune. The heart of our second year and of our project as a whole rested on the outcome of the six all-day seminars we planned on "Ethics and Public Administration." We were relying on these workshops to accomplish our central goal of motivating and preparing the faculty of the Rhode Island M.P.A. Program to integrate ethics into the entire curriculum. We are convinced these workshops were successful even beyond our expectations and hopes.

The main reason for success was the positive attitude of the faculty in these seminars that was nourished and reinforced by the encouragement of the twelve state agency leaders who were also participants. We had invited the administrators to provide "reality testing" to the ideas on ethics. They certainly played this role, but what we could not have expected was how eager they would be to take part in these discussions on ethics and how contagious their enthusiasm would be for the faculty. Mutual respect and real bonds developed in the group between academics and practitioners. One had a sense that the discussions at our rural retreat were regarded by all participants as a rare opportunity. We feel confident that faculty will treat ethics now in courses on budgets, evaluation, and personnel not because they have to, not because they are urged to, but for the best and probably only effective reason: because they find the topic important to themselves professionally and personally.

As we begin to enter the dissemination phase of our project, we think we have some significant lessons to share with the other 220 M.P.A. programs in the country. Possibly foremost among those lessons would be how willing practicing public administrators at all levels are to learn more about ethics and how valuable their experience can be in helping faculty to see the importance of ethics in the discipline. We believe our seminars can work in any state if done correctly, and we have many ideas about concrete tactics to bring about faculty and practitioner collaboration.

Perhaps the best evidence of the extent of collaboration in our seminars is that the participants have agreed to write a book together. Two-person teams of an academic and practitioner will focus on a particularly trying ethical dilemma in the experience of the administrator and analyze and comment on this dilemma. Together we will produce a book of thirteen case studies and commentaries under the title "Hard Choices." Such a collaborative book will be unique in the discipline and Praeger Books has already offered us a contract for it.

The strongest indication of the success of our project to date is the award of a \$535,000 outright gift to the University of Rhode Island to endow the permanent John Hazen White Center for Ethics and Public Service. This center would not have been conceived, let alone funded, without the example of our FIPSE project and we see it as a striking vindication of FIPSE's faith that our proposal could begin something new and worthwhile.

Organization Type: Public College or University

Institution Type: Doctoral

SUBJECTS:

- ◦ ◦ Ethics
- ◦ ◦ Faculty Development

Subject Key:

- ◦ ◦ Highly relevant
- ◦ Relevant
- Slightly relevant

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